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Will the Closure of Church Buildings Shake the Faith of True Christians?

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Recent actions by various governments to close down churches that fail to meet certain standards have sparked concern among many Christians. These closures are not new, but they are gaining attention as we approach the end times—a period foretold in Scripture that will be marked by the rise of the Antichrist. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many churches were forced to close their doors due to health and safety regulations, which intensified the concern among believers. Currently, many countries are imposing increasing restrictions on religious gatherings and even on pastors, further exacerbating the issue. This leads us to a critical question: Will Christians fall away from their faith simply because their churches are closed? Such a belief reveals a misunderstanding of what the church truly is. If one's Christianity is tied to the four walls of a building, then such faith may be more superficial than spiritual. To understand the essence of true Christianity and the church as God intended, we must delve deeper into the Scriptures.

Gathering in a church building to study the Scriptures is undoubtedly beneficial. The Bible encourages us to meet together, especially as the day of the Lord draws near: *"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near"* (Hebrews 10:24-25). However, if one's Christianity is solely dependent on attending a brick-and-mortar church, then the essence of making one's body a temple of the Holy Spirit is missed entirely. As Paul reminds us, *"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own"* (1 Corinthians 6:19). Christianity that is merely external—focused on a physical structure—fails to grasp the internal transformation that marks true faith.

Consider a scenario where a Christian moves to a country where Christianity is not accepted, such as North Korea, Saudi Arabia, or China. In such places, churches are nonexistent, Bible apps are banned, and Christian social media is censored. There is no opportunity of gathering either virtual or in-person. Will such a Christian cease to be a follower of Christ? If the answer is yes, then perhaps their faith was never rooted in Christ but rather in the comfort and security of a church building. The reality is that the true church is not a building, but the body of believers—each person who has accepted Christ as Lord and Savior. As Jesus said, *"For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them"* (Matthew 18:20). This gathering can happen anywhere, regardless of whether it occurs within the four walls of a designated church building.

Today, it is common for people to believe that if someone has not been attending church, they have *"fallen away"* from the faith. This notion is further reinforced by preachers who emphasize the necessity of attending their specific church, often implying that one's spiritual well-being is tied to regular attendance at a particular location. While fellowship with other believers is crucial, as emphasized in Hebrews 10:25, equating church attendance with the entirety of one's faith misses the broader, more profound truth that Christianity is about a personal relationship with Christ, not merely about being present in a church building.

To fully understand the transition from the physical temple to the spiritual temple within us, we must consider how the Old Testament foreshadowed Jesus Christ. The tabernacle in the wilderness, a movable tent where God dwelled among His people after He gave them the law through Moses, was a foreshadowing of Christ. The tabernacle was not a place for preaching but a place of sacrifice, pointing to Christ's ultimate sacrifice on the cross. Scripture tells us that God's presence filled the tabernacle: *"Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle"* (Exodus 40:34). Later, during Solomon's reign, the tabernacle was replaced by the temple in Jerusalem, a more permanent structure where sacrifices continued, and God's glory again filled the temple: *"And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord"* (1 Kings 8:10-11).

However, these physical structures were merely shadows of the true temple that was to come—Jesus Christ Himself. When Christ came, He fulfilled the law and the prophets, embodying the temple in His own person. Jesus spoke of His body as the temple: *"Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking about the temple of his body"* (John 2:19-21). After Christ's resurrection and ascension, the physical temple was no longer the dwelling place of God's presence. Instead, the Holy Spirit of Christ now dwells within believers, making each one a temple of God. This shift underscores the spiritual nature of the church, which is no longer confined to a physical building but is now embodied in the lives of believers.

As time passed, the synagogue emerged during the Babylonian exile when Jews needed a place to teach the Torah and maintain their cultural identity. Unlike the tabernacle and the temple, synagogues were not places of sacrifice but were devoted to teaching and community gathering. This model is similar to today's churches, where believers gather to study Scripture and encourage one another. However, it is crucial to note that synagogues were exclusive to Jews. In the time of the apostles, because Jews did not accept Jesus as the Messiah, early Christians were barred from synagogues and often met in temples or homes. When persecution intensified, the early Christians shifted to house churches, a practice that Paul often referenced in his letters: *"Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus... Greet also the church in their house"* (Romans 16:3,5).

For over 300 years, Christians continued worshipped in secret, often in their homes, under the threat of persecution from the Roman Empire. During this time, being caught could mean death. Yet, despite these challenges, the early church grew stronger. It was in this period of persecution that Christians compiled the letters and writings that would eventually form the New Testament. It was only in 313 AD, under Emperor Constantine, that Christians were allowed to meet publicly without fear of persecution. Constantine's decision to legalize Christianity was, however, a double-edged sword. While it provided freedom, it also led to the blending of Christian practices with pagan traditions, resulting in the syncretic practices that would define the Catholic Church. The construction of grand basilicas began, marking the shift from house churches to the establishment of formal church buildings.

As we look at the early church, we see that despite meeting in different house churches, they did not experience divisions but recognized their unity in Christ. The apostles referred to the church in specific cities, such as the church of Ephesus, Corinth, or Rome. Paul often addressed these local churches as part of the larger body of Christ: *"To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours"* (1 Corinthians 1:2). Despite geographical separations, the early Christians understood that they were all members of one body, united by their faith in Christ.

In contrast, many modern churches have deviated from this biblical model. Churches today have often become places of entertainment and social gain, rather than centers of spiritual edification. Some church leaders have turned their ministries into businesses, focusing more on profit than on preaching the Gospel. Jesus warned against such practices when He cleansed the temple, saying, *"My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers"* (Matthew 21:13). Churches have also become places where false teachings and destructive practices are rampant, accommodating everyone—including sorcerers, liars, and fortune-tellers—without calling them to repentance. The Bible warns us of such times: *"For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions"* (2 Timothy 4:3). Instead of being places of refuge and truth, many churches have become breeding grounds for spiritual deception. However, we believe that true believers will not be swayed by all of these, and these are the true Church of Christ.

The church is not merely a building; it is the body of Christ, composed of all believers. Whether we meet in grand cathedrals, small homes, open fields, or online, the church remains vibrant and alive as long as we remain faithful to Christ. The early Christians thrived under persecution, and they left us a legacy of faith that has endured for centuries. As the end times draw near, Christians should be even more resolved to stand firm in their faith, understanding that the closure of physical churches does not mark the end of Christianity but rather an opportunity for the true church to shine even brighter.

As we face increasing challenges in the world, including the potential closure of churches due to government regulations, emerging diseases, or the Antichrist's reign, let us remember that our faith is not confined to a building. These are possibilities Christians must be prepared for. True Christians, however, will not be weakened by such trials. In fact, Scripture teaches that the church thrives under persecution: *"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"* (2 Timothy 3:12). The true temple is within us, and the church is wherever believers gather in the name of Jesus. The Bible encourages us to *"not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect"* (Romans 12:2). May we, as true Christians, resist the end-time temptations and remain steadfast in our faith, knowing that God's presence is with us wherever we go.

As we approach the end, the Bible tells us that *"the wicked will do wickedly, and none of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand"* (Daniel 12:10). This means that as evil increases in the world, those conforming to Christianity will leave and join their evildoers but true Christians will stand firm in their faith, resisting the temptations and pressures of the times. Jesus Himself warned that *"because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved"* (Matthew 24:12-13). In these times, religious people who were likely never true Christians will separate from true believers. True Christians will not be swayed by the closing of church buildings or by the rise of false teachings. Instead, they will cling to the truth of God's Word and the presence of the Holy Spirit within them.

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